

Children, Young People and Families Occupational
Therapy Team

TOILETING ADVICE FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Toilet Training for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Many children with ASD find it difficult to achieve independence in toileting. Children with ASD find it difficult to adapt to change and tend to want to hold on to learned and familiar behaviour routines. For this reason, it is very difficult to get the child with ASD to move on from very early learned behaviour that going to the toilet means performing in a nappy. The following information outlines classical toilet training strategies and adapted strategies for the child with ASD. It is possible to use elements of both methods to devise a programme most suitable to your child.



It is important to establish that the child has the potential control of bowel/bladder movements. Repeated failure to succeed may require discussion with the child's doctor.

For general strategies please see full 'Toileting Advice Booklet'.

Strategies for children with ASD

- The child with ASD may experience great anxiety/fear when faced with a change to their routine. As a result it is common for children with ASD to remain dry/clean for hours until a nappy is replaced and not respond to usual toilet training strategies.
- Certain sensory aspects such as the sound of flushing, the feel of the toilet seat (being too high, too cold or too hard) and a fear of dirtying their hands when cleaning, may be problems to overcome. Some simple strategies to follow are as follows:
 - Have clear consistent routines in all of the child's care settings.
 - Change routines very gradually.
 - Using lower potty chairs/soft padded toilet seats may help reduce anxiety.
 - Use picture timetables/visual prompts such as drawings/photos to raise awareness of toileting.
 - Incorporate tactile/messy play into their everyday experience.

The following procedure can be followed, however, time scales for moving from one stage to the next must be flexible, child led and clearly communicated to everyone involved.

Step 1

Get used to and familiar with the toilet environment without challenging too much. For example, sitting on the toilet with the lid down to wash hands/face etc.

Take the child into the toilet environment at established times that they usually empty their bowel/bladder. This will begin to get them to associate performing within the right environment. At this stage, allow the child to continue wearing a nappy all of the time.

Step 2

Allow the child to wear pants throughout but replacing a nappy when taken into the toilet environment at previously established key times. At school or home the child could observe others using the toilet without yet being asked to sit on the toilet itself.

Step 3

Begin to encourage the child to sit on the toilet immediately following a nappy being put on. Initially, clothing should also be replaced as usual.

Step 4

Now remove lower clothing so that the child is sitting on the toilet with only a nappy in place.

Step 5

Gradually loosen the nappy tabs until the nappy can be just draped over the toilet aperture.

Step 6

The nappy size could be gradually reduced and/or a hole cut into it to allow urine/faeces to go into the toilet. This can then be shown to the child to reinforce the desired performance.

Step 7

Leave using nappies completely and continue with a regularly prompted toileting routine.

It is important to provide prompts at regular intervals once step 7 is achieved, as children with autism often are not aware of their bodily signals that they need to go the toilet. They could continue to retain urine/faeces if not monitored carefully.

Do not encourage undesired ritualistic behaviours that children sometimes want when going to the toilet. Going along with these may make life more difficult later.

Other Factors to Consider

Inability to communicate needs. Look for signs in behaviour/non-verbal expression that indicates that the child needs to go to the toilet. Try using signing/pictures to enable the child to let others know that they need to go to the toilet and to enable carers to communicate their expectations of behavior.

Special Aids for Toilet Training

Bed Wetting Alarms – A enuresis alarms is a device that wakes a child who begins wet the bed, giving them the chance to get to the lavatory. These bed wetting alarms can help children improve their toileting habits.

Available from:

www.healthandcare.co.uk

www.welcomemobility.co.uk

Priced from £39.49



Mattress covers - Waterproof under sheets.

Available from:

www.thesleepsanctuary.co.uk

www.bedlinencentre.co.uk

Priced from £4.99



Night suits – Sleepsuits offer a practical solution for night time undressing and interference with incontinence aids, smearing or self harming.

Available from:

www.shop.kcsleepsuits.co.uk

Priced from £29.00

